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ABSTRACT

Educational research suggests that the involvement of parents of low socioeconomic status (SES) children in the educational process has a positive influence on the children's academic achievement. At the preschool level, studies in which parents were instructed concerning methods of promoting their children's intellectual development were found to be particularly successful in producing long-term improvements in the academic achievement of low SES children. A few studies also report success in improving the achievement of low SES children whose parents work as paraprofessionals in the school, or serve in an advisory capacity for preschool programs. At the elementary level, the limited research which is available indicates that parents who serve as tutors for their children can improve their children's academic achievement. More research on methods of improving academic achievement through parent involvement programs is still needed, but the research thus far has generally shown that such programs do have a positive effect on academic achievement. (Author)

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# REVIEW OF RESEARCH IN PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION

INTERIM REPORT

LOW SES AND MINORITY STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT STUDY

July, 1977


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ABSTRACT

REVIEW OF RESEARCH IN PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION

Educational research suggests that the involvement of parents of low socio-economic status (SES) children in the educational process has a positive influence on the children's academic achievement.

At the preschool level, studies in which parents were instructed concerning methods of promoting their children's intellectual development were found to be particularly successful in producing long-term improvements in the academic achievement of low SES children. A few studies also report success in improving the achievement of low SES children whose parents work as paraprofessionals in the school, or serve in an advisory capacity for preschool programs.

At the elementary level, the limited research which is available indicates that parents who serve as tutors for their children can improve their children's academic achievement.

More research on methods of improving academic achievement through parent involvement programs is still needed, but the research thus far has generally shown that such programs do have a positive effect on academic achievement.

## INTRODUCTION

*Educational and social research suggests that parental involvement in the educational process has a positive influence on the child's academic achievement.* Research has found the following to be related to academic achievement (Ware, 1973; Brophy, Good, and Nedler, 1975):

- the amount of academic guidance and direct instruction provided in the home;
- the cognitive level and style of the parents;
- the amount of reading and educational materials available in the home;
- the frequency of verbal contact between parents and child;
- the attitude of the parents toward the school;
- the parents' willingness to devote time to their children.

Observations that parents differ in their ability to teach children effectively, and the lack of success of intervention programs which do not involve parents, have led to efforts to improve the academic achievement of low socio-economic status (SES) and ethnic minority children by increasing the parents' involvement in their children's education.

The term "parental involvement" has been used to refer to a wide range of activities by parents, including:

- parents tutoring their child on specific tasks, or receiving training and using methods designed to generally enhance their child's intellectual development in the home;
- parents performing duties within the school, either as volunteers, or paid employees;
- parents serving as community aides, and acting as liaisons between the homes and schools;
- parents serving on committees and acting either as advisors or decision makers in matters concerning school practices;
- parents simply displaying general interest in their children's education, by keeping informed of their academic progress and/or attending parent-teacher conferences or PTA meetings (Safran, 1974, Stanford Research Institute, 1973).

The effects of parental involvement on academic achievement can be best examined separately for the preschool and the elementary years.

## PRESCHOOL LEVEL

*At the preschool level, studies generally show that parental involvement is beneficial.* Studies in which parents were instructed concerning methods of promoting their child's intellectual development in the home were found to be successful whether the child was simultaneously enrolled in a preschool program or not (Bronfenbrenner, 1974; Schaefer and Edgerton, 1974; Brophy et. al., 1975; Honig, 1975). A few studies investigated the effect of employing parents as paraprofessional staff in home visit and other early childhood programs. Generally, positive impacts have been found for participating children. Evaluations of preschool programs which encourage involvement of parents in classroom, decision-making, and related activities have generally found that students with parents who become actively involved have higher achievement than children with non-participating parents (Stanford Research Institute, 1973; Willmon, 1969).

Bronfenbrenner (1974) reviewed the results of nine early education programs which focused simultaneously on both the parent and child, and reports that substantial IQ and achievement score gains were still found three to four years after the end of the intervention programs. (It should be noted that in these studies the children had not yet gone beyond the end of the first grade.) The effects were cumulative from year to year, both during the program, and in some cases, after the program's end. Achievement and IQ scores typically reveal similar results. The IQ gains were greatest for the children who entered the intervention programs earliest (i.e. 1-2 year olds). Also, parent intervention was found to be of benefit not only to the target child, but also to his/her siblings. Gains from parent involvement during the preschool years were less when a staff member (such as a teacher), rather than a parent, assumed the primary responsibility for the child's development. Schaefer and Edgerton (1974) report similar findings.

Klaus and Gray also found similar results for a summer preschool experience followed by weekly home visits which emphasized training the parent as a child's teacher. This program studied effects through the fourth grade, and continued to find lasting gains in achievement and IQ scores (Klaus and Gray, 1968; Thomas and Bowermaster, 1974).

Bronfenbrenner (1974) analyzed the role of parent-child interaction in aiding the child's psychological development, and reports that the key elements in the first three years of life include the involvement of the parent and child in verbal interaction around a cognitively challenging task, and the existence of a mutual and enduring emotional attachment between the child and adult. Therefore, he suggests a program for one- to three-year-olds centered on periodic home visits by a school representative, who can make suggestions and provide materials for developing this type of relationship and interaction. Bronfenbrenner believes the four to six-year-old can benefit from a cognitively oriented organized preschool program, but it should be accompanied by a strong parent involvement component to enhance and sustain its effects (also see Brophy et al., 1975).

In many cases, preschool programs begin involving parents at the same time that other innovations are instituted. In cases in which preschool programs include parental involvement, it is often difficult to separate the effects of each component if a comparable control group is not available for comparison. Even if the program is successful in improving low SES student achievement, it is impossible to tell whether these effects are due to some facet of the preschool experience, the involvement of parents, or both (e.g. Hartford Public Schools, 1974).

Another important issue is the effect of different amounts of parent involvement. Radin (1971) conducted a study which is valuable in determining these effects during preschool. The group with maximum parent involvement showed the most intellectual growth. Radin concludes that a parent involvement program is important, even though the effects on achievement may not be immediate. The parents' perception of themselves as educators may improve, and change parent behaviors in ways which promote the child's cognitive development.

Willmon (1969) also found that the parents who were actively involved in their child's preschool education (by supervising field trips, giving demonstrations, helping with learning activities and class projects) had children who showed significantly better scores on reading readiness one year later, when compared to children whose parents showed no involvement.

Thus, parent involvement does seem beneficial at the preschool level, although further research is needed to determine the most successful types of involvement, the optimal amount needed, and whether an organized preschool program is also necessary to improve achievement.

## ELEMENTARY LEVEL

The data concerning the effect of parent involvement on academic achievement at the elementary level is not as plentiful as that for the preschool years.

Some studies deal with efforts to teach low SES parents tutoring skills to improve achievement. McConnell (1974) successfully used this technique for a bilingual migrant project. Parents tutored small groups of children while the families were migratory, and provided supplemental tutoring to students leaving the Head Start program when the families were stationary. In a study by McKinney (1975), students whose parents received 30 hours of training in tutoring skills showed significantly better performance in reading and math than the children of parents who were not trained. Also, parents who received the training displayed a much more positive attitude toward school. O'Neil (1975) studied first, second, and third grade children who were at least one year below grade level in reading. Students who were tutored by their parents received higher reading achievement scores than those who were not. However, children of parents who received weekly supervision did not do significantly better than children whose parents were simply given an instructional guide.

The Stanford Research Institute (1973) reports that a Michigan project succeeded in getting parents to read to, listen to, and provide study space for their children, with good results for academic achievement. Clegg (1973) designed 8 word games for low SES parents to play with their second grade children. She found that children exposed to the games had higher achievement in vocabulary and composite reading compared to those without such exposure.

In a study by Henderson and Swanson (1974), parents were trained to use social learning principles to develop question-asking skills in their first grade children. Significant differences were found between the children of trained and untrained parents in terms of academic achievement and the amount of question-asking exhibited.

Utilizing a slightly different approach, Myers (1971) attempted to counsel the parents of sixth grade underachievers, and found that the success of the method was related to the quality of the participation by the parents.

A few studies have reported somewhat less positive results from parent involvement programs. Heisler and Crowley (1969) attempted to increase the involvement of parents of low SES first and second graders in classroom activities and educational programs at the school. They reported only limited educational improvement after a long-term effort. It is interesting to note that this program, in contrast to some of the more successful ones, depended on the parents coming to the school to participate in their child's education, rather than having a school representative visit the home. A study of programs employing a home-based intervention model designed by the University of Florida reports mixed results. Children in some experimental programs showed consistent

achievement advantages over comparison groups; others did not. However, project evaluators were fairly confident that the project did have positive effects, since data collection problems were evident in most of the unsuccessful experimental programs.

Bronfenbrenner (1974) reports the 1968 findings of Smith, who found that parent intervention which was continuous from preschool through the sixth grade was successful in maintaining achievement gains by the students. He contends that during the elementary years, the parent should support the child's school activities at home and participate in activities at school which directly affect his/her child. Thus, the parent need not be the child's principal teacher, but should act in an important support role, which helps sustain and enhance the effects of group school programs.

*Thus far, it seems that programs which train low SES parents in tutoring techniques have been the most successful in improving achievement at the elementary level.* However, this may be due to a lack of good experimental research testing other methods. Very little formal research has been done to test the effect on student achievement of employing parents as aides and/or having them serve as advisors or policy makers at the elementary level (Stanford Research Institute, 1973). A great deal of additional research is still needed before any solid conclusions can be drawn concerning the role low SES parents should play in their child's education at the elementary level in order to improve achievement.

## SUMMARY

*In a general sense, it seems that parent involvement can be effective in improving the academic achievement of low SES and ethnic minority children. Improving the parents' knowledge of ways in which to promote the child's general intellectual development and academic achievement can potentially be very beneficial.* Changing the parents' attitudes toward the school and their child's academic potential, as well as the parents' own feeling of competence in the role of teacher, may be an important first step towards improving low SES student achievement. It is also important to realize that parents with low SES backgrounds are willing, in the majority of cases, to become involved in their child's education, if approached in the proper fashion. Future research must focus on finding the most effective methods of employing parent involvement to improve the achievement of low SES and ethnic minority children.

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